The Latest: US says world closer to key goal on climate deal

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Body

UNITED NATIONS (AP) - The Latest on the U.N. signing ceremony for the Paris Agreement on climate change (all times local):

4:25 p.m.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry says countries representing about half of the world's global emissions that contribute to global warming intend to join the Paris climate agreement this year.

"I understand that as of this afternoon, countries representing nearly 50 percent of global emissions are prepared to announce they will join this year," and the U.S. is among them, Kerry said.

The U.N. says 175 countries signed the agreement Friday. Signing is one step; formally joining is the final one. The agreement enters into force once 55 countries representing at least 55 percent of global emissions have joined it.

An analysis by the World Resources Institute has found that at least 25 countries representing 45 percent of global emissions joined the agreement Friday or committed to joining it early.

Other countries that said Friday they intend to join the agreement this year include China, Canada, Mexico and Australia.

4:15 p.m.

Former U.S. vice president and climate activist Al Gore says the world began a "historic journey" with the signing of the climate change agreement and there is now the opportunity "to avoid the catastrophic damage that would otherwise befall us."

He said celebrations aren't in order because there is much to be done and damage from climate events will continue and worsen.

But Gore said there is "great hope and promise" for strengthened action to combat climate change, pointing to the price of carbon-free renewable energy continuing to plummet and businesses and investors moving very swiftly to finance the de-carbonization of the economy.

Gore said he is "optimistic" about the journey the world is now embarking on.

"We have to go far quickly," he said. "It is a difficult journey and some doubt that we have the resolve to make it successful. I do not because I do know that the will to act and the will to succeed and in our case the will to survive is itself a renewable resource."

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3:15 p.m.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry says the United States "absolutely intends to join" the landmark Paris Agreement on climate change this year.

He spoke after the U.S. joined 174 other countries on Friday in signing the agreement, a key step toward its implementation. The next step is having countries formally approve the agreement through their domestic procedures.

The Obama administration says the deal is consistent with existing U.S. law and doesn't require the approval of the Republican-controlled Senate, where it would likely face stiff resistance.

The administration is expected to treat the deal as an executive agreement, which needs only the president's approval.

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2:35 p.m.

China's climate envoy says his government hopes the United States will join the global climate agreement "as soon as possible."

Xie Zhenhua spoke to reporters after China announced it would "finalize domestic procedures" to ratify the Paris Agreement before it hosts the G-20 summit in September.

China is the world's top carbon emitter, and the U.S. is second.

When asked why other countries should honor their climate commitments if the U.S. doesn't join the agreement, Xie said China is working "for humankind" and is "very positive" about the deal's future.

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1:55 p.m.

President Barack Obama is welcoming the signing of the climate agreement saying he hopes it will allow "all of our children to inherit a cleaner, healthier, and safer planet."

He said in a statement Friday that as the world's second-largest source of carbon emissions, the United States has a responsibility to act.

Obama also is reminding people of his campaign pledge years ago to work "with anyone - across the aisle or on the other side of the planet - to combat this threat."

Other countries are watching to see what Obama's successor will do with the agreement, especially if it does not enter into force before he leaves office.

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1 p.m.

The Latest: US says world closer to key goal on climate deal

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says at least 175 countries are signing the landmark Paris Agreement on climate change on the first day it is open for signatures. That number is easily a record for a global agreement.

Dozens of world leaders continue to sign the agreement, some with personal touches. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry held his young granddaughter, and gave her a kiss, as he signed.

Ban, who has championed action on climate change during his years as U.N. chief, says the day is "a very moving day for me personally."

He is urging countries to announce their timelines for the next step, ratifying the agreement, so it can enter into force as soon as possible.

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12:45 p.m.

Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz is criticizing the climate agreement being signed by the U.S. and 170 other countries on Friday as the Obama administration's latest attack on American families.

"Rather than turning attention and resources to real national security threats, such as radical Islamic terrorists who want to kill us, the Obama administration is instead focused on the SUV parked in your driveway," the conservative Texas senator said in a statement.

Cruz says the White House is "full of global warming alarmists."

Some nations have expressed concern about what will happen if the climate deal doesn't enter into force before President Barack Obama leaves office early next year - and if Cruz or Donald Trump becomes president.

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12:15 p.m.

Non-government organizations are welcoming the signing by 171 countries of the Paris Agreement on climate change but warn that states still have a long way to go.

"We'll hold our leaders to account. We'll hold each other to account," Rhea Suh, the president of the New York-based Natural Resources Defense Council, said in a statement.

David Waskow of the World Resources Institute in Washington said he was encouraged by the statement on behalf of the least developed countries by Congo's President Joseph Kabila, who said the countries have announced their intention to ratify the agreement as soon as possible.

He said that indicates that momentum is building toward the agreement's early implementation.

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11:52 a.m.

Prime Minister Enele Sosene Sopoaga of Tuvalu, which has seen four of its small islands disappear into the Pacific Ocean since 2000, says the historic climate agreement has to be transformed into "an international call to action" that will change the world and the lives of future generations.

He said Tuvalu was not only signing but ratifying the Paris agreement on Friday and urged all countries to make sure it enters into force at the soonest possible time to ensure "that climate change is not irreversible."

Sopoaga said small island developing countries urgently need better access to financing to protect against climate change and urged international support for an insurance program for Pacific island nations.

He said recent studies suggest that an average of 62,000 people are displaced every day due to climate change or weather-related disasters - "a staggering figure" that "should ring alarm bells throughout the world."

He called for a U.N. General Assembly resolution to legally protect the rights and needs of people displaced by the impact of climate change.

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11:02 a.m.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry says the signing of the climate agreement by a record number of countries is a moment for world leaders to recommit to actually win the "war" against carbon emissions that are making the planet hotter every year.

"The urgency of this challenge is only becoming more pronounced," he said, "and this is why our gathering today is, in fact, historic."

Kerry said the power of last December's climate agreement "is the message that it sends to the marketplace."

It is going "to unleash the private sector" to define the new energy of the future and set the global economy on a new path to development that preserves the environment, he said.

Kerry reiterated that the United States will formally join the agreement this year, and urged all other countries to join as well.

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11:00 a.m.

Leaders from 171 countries have begun signing the Paris Agreement on climate change as the landmark deal takes a key step toward entering into force years ahead of schedule.

The ceremony is setting a record for international diplomacy: Never have so many countries signed an agreement on the first available day. States that don't sign Friday have a year to do so.

Many now expect the climate agreement to enter into force long before the original deadline of 2020. Some say it could happen this year.

"We are in a race against time," U.N. secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the gathering. "The era of consumption without consequences is over."

French President Francois Hollande is the first to sign, followed by the 15 countries that are also ratifying the agreement Friday.

The agreement will enter into force once 55 countries representing at least 55 percent of global emissions have formally joined it. The United States and China, which together account for nearly 40 percent of global emissions, have said they intend to join this year.

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10:50 a.m.

Leonardo DiCaprio is urging world leaders to leave fossil fuels "in the ground where they belong" as he tells them they are the "last best hope" for saving the planet from the disastrous effects of global warming.

The actor, who is a U.N. Messenger of Peace with a special focus on climate change, spoke shortly before the leaders began signing the Paris Agreement.

"We can congratulate each other today, but it will mean absolutely nothing" if you return to your countries and don't take action to implement the deal, DiCaprio said.

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10:20 a.m.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has brought cheers from the gathering by speaking up for developing countries, saying that "they shouldn't be punished for a problem they didn't create."

He says Canada will invest $2.56 billion over next five years to help such countries meet the goals of the climate agreement.

Trudeau also says Canada will ratify the climate agreement later this year.

"Climate change will test our intelligence, our passion and our will," he says. "But we are equal to that challenge."

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10 a.m.

Brazil's president is using the signing ceremony to briefly address the political crisis at home, calling the effort to oust her a "grave moment" for the country and thanking leaders who have expressed solidarity with her.

President Dilma Rousseff says she has no doubt the Brazilian people "will be able to prevent any setback." Despite the crisis, she says, "Brazil is a great nation, with a society that was able to defeat authoritarianism and build a vibrant democracy."

On climate, Rousseff says her country will restore and reforest 12 million hectares (30 million acres) of forests and 15 million hectares of degraded pastures and increase the nation's reliance on renewable sources to 45 percent of the energy matrix in order to reduce emissions, without offering any timetable.

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9:50 a.m.

China says it will "finalize domestic procedures" to ratify the landmark Paris Agreement on climate change before the G-20 summit in China in September.

The world's top carbon emitter has said it would ratify the agreement this year, but Friday's announcement of a deadline is new.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon immediately welcomed the pledge.

China spoke shortly before world leaders from more than 170 countries began signing the agreement.

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9:35 a.m.

French President Francois Hollande says he will ask parliament to ratify the Paris Agreement on climate change "by the summer of this year."

He spoke shortly before world leaders from more than 170 countries began signing the agreement. "There is no turning back now," he said.

The agreement will enter into force once 55 countries representing at least 55 percent of global emissions have formally joined it. The United States and China, which together account for nearly 40 percent of global emissions, have said they intend to join this year.

Hollande, the U.N. chief and French Environment Minister Segolene Royal, who is in charge of global climate negotiations, invited leaders from all 193 U.N. member states to Friday's event.

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9:20 a.m.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says at the start of a high-level U.N. ceremony where a record 171 countries are expected to sign the landmark climate change agreement that "history is in the making."

The U.N. chief told global leaders and ministers on Friday that the world is in "a race against time," citing record global temperatures, record ice loss and record carbon levels in the atmosphere.

"The era of consumption without consequences is over," Ban said. "We must intensify efforts to decarbonize our economies."

Ban, who recalled that climate change has been his top priority since he became secretary-general over nine years ago, urged all countries to ratify the agreement so it can come into force as early as possible.

The agreement will enter into force once 55 countries representing at least 55 percent of global emissions have formally joined it.

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00:02 a.m.

Up to 170 countries are expected to sign the Paris Agreement on climate change Friday as the landmark deal moves closer to entering into force years ahead of schedule.

Secretary of State John Kerry is joining dozens of world leaders for a U.N. ceremony that should set a record for international diplomacy: Never have so many countries signed an agreement on the first available day.

States that don't sign Friday have a year to do so.

Many expect the climate agreement to enter into force long before the original deadline of 2020. Some say it could happen this year.

After signing, countries must formally approve the agreement through their domestic procedures. The United Nations says at least 13 countries could take that step Friday by depositing their instruments of ratification.

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